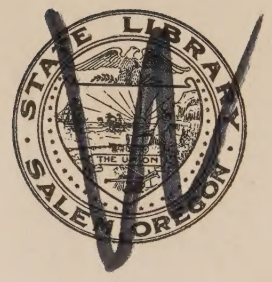
Aglavaine and Selysette

Maurice Maeterlinck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AGLAVAINE AND SELYSETTE

THE WORKS OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

ESSAYS

THE TREASURE OF THE HUMBLE
WISDOM AND DESTINY
THE LIFE OF THE BEE
THE BURIED TEMPLE
THE DOUBLE GARDEN
THE MEASURE OF THE HOURS
DEATH
ON EMERSON, AND OTHER ESSAYS
OUR ETERNITY
THE UNKNOWN GUEST

PLAYS

SISTER BEATRICE AND ARDIANE AND BARBE BLEUE
JOYZELLE AND MONNA VANNA
THE BLUE BIRD, A FAIRY PLAY
MARY MAGDALENE
PÉLLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE, AND OTHER PLAYS
PRINCESS MALEINE
THE INTRUDER, AND OTHER PLAYS
AGLAVAINE AND SELYSETTE

HOLIDAY EDITIONS

OUR FRIEND THE DOG
THE SWARM
THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE FLOWERS
CHRYSANTHEMUMS
THE LEAF OF OLIVE
THOUGHTS FROM MAETERLINCK
THE BLUE BIRD
THE LIFE OF THE BEE
NEWS OF SPRING AND OTHER NATURE STUDIES
POEMS

Aglavaine and Selysette

A Drama in Five Acts

BY

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

Introduction and Translation by

ALFRED SUTRO

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1915

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PREFACE

I

It is more than doubtful whether any work of Maeterlinck's, even in its translated form, requires any Introduction—except it be in the nature of an apology, on the part of the translator, for the inadequacy of his version. But the publishers of this book have been insistent that I should furnish them with some kind of preface; and, after all, there is the comforting reflection that very few people will read it. So much has been written about Maeterlinck these past years! It is a feature of the times we live in that five books are written about a great man of letters for every one of his. Nor would I have consented to add to the mass were I not conscious of the fact that, possessing no sort of critical faculty, I would attempt neither to analyse nor to appraise—but simply, and perhaps naively, to admire. I am no longer M. Maeterlinck's translator; that office has

devolved upon Mr. Teixeira de Mattos and right admirably does he fulfil it. But there are many books of the great Belgian's that I have rendered into English; and, being a slow worker, loving to linger over his fine, melodious sentences, seeking to capture, for hours sometimes, the turn of a phrase, its harmonious balance and cadence, I have lived for a very long time in his brain. For the translator who cares for his work must, while translating, cease to be himself, he must be a reflex of the other, trying to think his thoughts, to feel as he felt, he must reproduce not only the bare words, but the lilt, the flow, the music, the hesitation and eagerness—ah, at least he must try, and, though he fail, as fail he must, there is joy in the trying—as I say, he lives in his master's brain, and knows it, as none other can know it, who merely reads the book. And surely than this brain of Maeterlinck's there has rarely been one that held more serenity and beauty, nobler wonder and sympathy, more dignity or loftier truth.

As I do not intend these few words of mine to be in any way a criticism of the

book, but rather a personal note about the man who wrote it, I think I cannot do better than describe my first meeting with him, many years ago, when his name was known only to the few, who already held him in high esteem as a mystic and symbolist.

II

It was at a rehearsal of a play of his—"Intérieur"—that was to be produced by a little Independent Theatre Society in Paris. The Society in question had very little money, but vast stores of enthusiasm; and its members were all very young. Those were the days when four or five poets, all living in garrets and happy if they could see a week's money ahead—would promptly start a "Revue" should one of their number, by some rare stroke of luck, come into fifty pounds. There was no lack of obliging and complaisant printers—printers in Paris are apt to possess quaint sympathy with the long-haired, shabby and enthusiastic young poets—the fifty pounds would change hands and the "Revue" would start, with a great flourish of trumpets, to expire,

in a blaze of glory, with the third or fourth number. But, in the meantime, there would have been an "Editor-in-Chief," whom his friends, the other contributors, would address as "Cher Maître"—it is surely unnecessary to say that the Editor would be the man with the fifty pounds—there would have been much junketing, and debating as to policy, solemn deliberations as to an article to be written, about a celebrity of the hour, that should "put him in his place" and reassure posterity—and, incidentally, much good sterling poetry. "Les Jeunes"—ah, Paris is, and always will be, the paradise of "Les Jeunes"! They grow old, and forsake their haunts and forget to sing; they become respectable, and begin to think of money, and position—but there are always others ready to take their place, and keep up the joyous tradition. And, truly, not the tradition that is so fondly cherished by the lady novelist who writes, from a fulness of ignorance, about the Latin Quarter. Disreputable they may be, the young men, but only because their attire is eccentric and their spirits a trifle too wild and exuberant; their minds are

clean and their ways the pleasant way of poesy; and the grisette may be their companion but not their goddess, who is, always and enduringly, the world's great sweetener and gentle teacher, that sovereign lady, Art.

III

And here, at the risk of keeping Maeterlinck waiting, at his rehearsal, I cannot refrain from describing an evening at Mallarmé's, the great, obscure poet who exercised so mighty an influence over all the young men of his time. In a dull little street, up three flights of stairs—in a long, narrow, unpretentious sitting-room, the furniture all of the simplest—there Mallarmé was "At Home," one evening a week, to his friends and those whom they chose to bring with them. The Master stood in front of the fireplace, one of the "anciens" seated at each corner; you were introduced, a word said of your own literary endeavour—you were received with the most exquisite courtesy, welcomed with the Master's beautiful smile—you took your place at the long table—and the talk, that your

arrival had interrupted, soon went on again. It was the business of the "anciens" at the corners to set it going, and see that it did not flag. And there was one talker only, Mallarmé. There he stood, with his pipe in his hand, that he was never allowed to light—for the moment he had finished his discourse, and looked for the matches, another subject was sprung upon him, and he eagerly started again. And the talk was good, of the best. In a sweet, low voice, every sentence issuing perfect and crystal-clear, he, whose poetry was of the obscurest, would illumine every theme that he handled, give his ripest wisdom and deepest thought to the young poets around him, his pupils and followers, the boys whom he loved and sought only to help. For such is the way of Paris, where there are no barriers set up between the beginner and the master, no door to exclude the man who has not yet succeeded from the hero of many successes. Art is more than a word there, more than a cult, it is a brotherhood; and the young scribbler may go to bed hungry in his attic under the roof, but never need he tell himself that he is friendless, or that

his poverty denies him the help and advice of the high priests of his craft.

IV

Marcel Prévost is fond of telling that the last rehearsal Dumas Fils attended was one of the "Demi-Vierge," which M. Prévost had adapted for the stage from his own novel. He sent the play to Dumas, who took a great interest in it, asked the author to call on him, gave advice, made suggestions, and was as eager for its success as though it had been a play of his own. These conditions, I am afraid, do not obtain outside Paris. There great painters will not turn a deaf ear to the appeal of any student of promise; they will climb up the countless stairs to his studio—criticise, point out mistakes in the work, and also admire and encourage—and they will not fail, if the work be good, to say a word in the proper quarter. I write, it is true, of the Paris of fifteen years ago—it may be that to-day things are no longer the same—but, at least, it is pleasant to think that there will have been no change. Of all the cities in the world, Paris is the one that has

its own real artistic atmosphere; and that must always endure. It has its love of beauty, and its men who put that high above all; it is still the land of endeavour, and its art is eternally young. The Post-Impressionists—how we scoffed at them over here! I have seen parties going through the gallery where their works were being exhibited, saturnine, bilious people who had come in groups for once to enjoy a hearty laugh, and who vowed that the pictures were quite too deliciously funny! That is not the way of Paris, the city of endeavour, that takes all endeavour seriously. And it often comes about, in a curious way, that what London laughs at to-day, it will pay high prices for to-morrow, and talk about with enthusiasm, as a new revelation in art.

V

But now it is fully time that I went back to the rehearsal, where I, who had read Maeterlinck's plays, and admired them immensely, was to be introduced to their author. At the back of the hall, in the midst of a crowd of enthusiastic youths,

stood a large, heavily built man, who seemed to be surveying the scene with some indifference—appeared to welcome the interruption, to seize gladly the chance to get away! Perhaps my shyness appealed to him, himself one of the shyest of men—or the fact, it may be, that I made no attempt to say flattering things. Be that as it may, in five minutes we were out in the street; with a nod here and there he had assured the actors that they were all wonderful; and, with a great sigh of relief, he escaped, and we rambled through Paris, and he talked, slowly and hesitatingly at first, then with great eagerness, about Meredith, Swinburne, Browning, Hardy—of any one, except himself. And since then we have met very often, and he still never talks of himself. For Maeterlinck has nothing of the pontiff in him, the scent of incense does not tickle his nostrils, he does not put himself, or his work, on a pedestal. I have another recollection of him when, vastly against his will, he was induced, I think for the only time in his life, to run the gauntlet of the crowd's admiration. It was at the first performance of "Pélléas

and Mélisande" at the Lyceum Theatre; when the curtain had fallen, amidst great enthusiasm, Maeterlinck allowed himself to be dragged on to the stage, there to receive the congratulations of his admirers. Lady after lady was brought up, introduced, and made her little flattering speech —and never was a man more genuinely unhappy than our poet! For to this strange creature it meant nothing to shake hands with a duchess; and when London hostesses tried to lionise him he promptly fled, to the amazement of the great ladies who could not understand that a mere genius should decline the honour of being present at one of their "At Homes."

VI

Some of his admirers, however, are simpler and less exacting. We were at Rome together, a few winters ago; and staying in our hotel were a cluster of American girls, eighteen or twenty of them, evidently a group who were all travelling together. It did not take these maidens long to discover that the tall, grey-haired man with the earnest, simple face was Maeter-

linck; and, when we went into the dining-room, for lunch or dinner, there they all were, waiting, and the twenty heads would swing round, watching him go into the inner room where we had our own meal; and, when we came out, though the other guests might have all departed, the twenty were still there; and to the master, as he went out, the same faithful, silent tribute of admiration was again offered. But beyond this, nothing—for some days we were in the hotel together, and none of them spoke to him, or asked for his autograph, or made the slightest attempt to approach or molest him. One day, the great table at which they had sat was empty; their holiday was over, the girls had gone. And that evening a letter was brought him, from one of them, their leader, perhaps, who had kept the others in check—a gentle simple letter in which he was told that his "Wisdom and Destiny" was the writer's constant companion, the book she loved above all others; that for years she had saved up her money to go to Rome, but that greater than all her joy at seeing the wonderful city was her delight at having seen Maeterlinck, the

man to whom she owed so much. The letter was unsigned. no address was given, there was no demand for a reply; but it came straight from her heart, and it went to his, and I have rarely known him more pleased. And if, by some rare chance, these lines should be seen by that American girl, she will like to know that her little tribute of praise was keenly appreciated by the man she honoured so highly.

VII

An athlete as well as a close student and omnivorous reader, his habits remaining always simple and methodical, he has retained, to a curious degree, the serenity the evenness of mind, that comes to those who spend their days far from the noise and bustle of towns, as far, also, from the material ambitions of men. He has the smile, to this day, of the child; he has the child's faculty of wonder. "Wisdom and Destiny," "The Life of the Bee," "The Blue Bird"—in all these there is the brain of a man, with the soul of a child, questioning Destiny. There are critics who term him a mystic, and pass on, satisfied with the label.

But if the word implies anything of mental fog or obscurity, then Maeterlinck is none. For his mind is of the clearest, the most limpid; sunlit, as it were, in every corner. Also it has the mighty quality of all great minds; it rests on solid arches of its own creation; there are no tottering planks, no insecure ways. Where he treads he treads steadily, firmly; advances no dubious theory, no hesitating doctrine; the real wisdom is with him, the wisdom born of the sweetness of soul. He loves what he writes, writes only of what he loves; and, the thing once written passes on, indifferent, and turns his eyes elsewhere. The author's vanity is unknown to him; he reserves his enthusiasm for the works of others. And the only subject on which you cannot interest him is precisely the subject of Maeterlinck.

VIII

He is a man of the theatre; he has the dramatic instinct strongly developed. "Intérieur," one of his earlier plays, revealed him as the possessor, to an extraordinary degree, of that intuitive technique without

which no man will ever succeed on the stage. It is characteristic of him, however, that he has never made the slightest attempt to write a play on the ordinary, accepted lines, be these of the most advanced; he has created a method of his own, a method bristling with difficulties, that become only too obvious to his imitators! But it suits the man; it adapts itself to his form of idea; to him it is the one means of expression. "Pélléas et Mélisande," that rare little masterpiece, with its haunting refrains and glimpses of perfect beauty, exhibits the most amazing stagecraft side by side with the most deliberate flouting of stage conventions. The action of "Monna Vanna" is arrested, again and again, by the deliberate utterances of Guido's father, whose mature wisdom broods lovingly over the play. We may remark, in passing, Maeterlinck's fondness for introducing an old man into his work; a mellow, ripe philosopher, whose lengthy sojourn in this world has only filled him with pity, and indulgence, and toleration; who surveys his fellows, enslaved as they are by the passions he himself has passed through, with the

gentleness that is born of understanding; who never condemns, but meekly offers of the fruits of his wisdom, realising that all that has happened is only deeply human.

"The Blue Bird" marked a change; here the philosopher in Maeterlinck gave place to the child; "The Blue Bird" was a frolic, in which he let his imagination and playfulness run riot, and have their unchecked way. All the quaint humour in him, the fun, the comprehension and love of children, found expression here; and its great success has proved that others have felt with him. But it took two years, after the play had been written, for any manager to believe that it had commercial possibilities, that it would appeal to the public; and even after its successful production in Moscow the experts shook their heads, one of them, in Paris, going so far as to suggest that Maeterlinck should call in a popular farce-writer as collaborator, to bring the thing into tune! And it is more than doubtful whether the play would have been seen to this day, outside Russia, but for the enthusiasm and enterprise of Mr. Herbert Trench, then manager of the

Haymarket Theatre, who chanced to be a poet as well as a manager. And few things have delighted Maeterlinck more than the success of "The Blue Bird."

IX

It was the direct appeal his play made to the great mass of the people that pleased Maeterlinck most. He is of those who value the crowd, the humbler ones, those whom he terms himself "the guardians of the watchfires of the tribe"; and he realised the full value of reaching them. And he had not, in the current phrase, "written down"—no, here was his ripest thought, all that was best in him. Had he not, daring greatly, let little Tyltyl declare that "There are no dead"? Had he not interwoven philosophic ideas into the scheme of the play, without thereby hampering the joyous spectacle, without puzzling or bewildering either adults or children? He recognised, as he should, that this was an achievement; he knew the deep delight that comes to the author when he finds himself at one with the people he writes for, not the clever ones only, but those, the

great mass, who are not clever—and, Heaven knows, none the worse for that! The student of Maeterlinck's work will find, in various of his essays, the thoughts that appear, in a more smiling form, in the play; there is one book of his, "The Buried Temple," containing much of his deepest and wisest, that was published years ago, and has never gone to a second edition; now this play, that crystallises, as it were, more than one essay of the book, goes round the world, attracting everywhere rapt and delighted audiences. In all the cities of England and America, in the remotest places, its reception is always the same; and it will remain, for a long time, the monument of the simplicity of a man of genius, who loved the people for whom he was writing.

X

"Aglavaine and Sélysette" is a work of a different order. A study, exquisite and delicate, of the eternal triangle, the one man and the two women. But here it is not as in the ordinary French play that deals with this thorny subject; there is no

delirious atmosphere of desire and passion; no, here all is subdued and tranquil, human emotions vibrate with subtler harmonies, nothing is gross, nothing is violent. Sélysette is Meleander's girl-wife; and for all that she has a grandmother and a little sister, her past is as vague and shadowy as that of Mélisande. Aglavaine, the majestic and stately woman whom we find so often in Maeterlinck's plays, comes to the castle—it is always a castle—and she and Meleander love each other, with a love that they assure themselves is unlike the love of this world. But behind them is Nature, with her iron laws; and their love, for all their fine aspirations, proves itself only human. Ah, the strange, pathetic little play, so full of beauty and tenderness! "Is it not strange," Aglavaine says to Sélysette, "I love you, I love Meleander, he loves you, too, you love us both, and yet we cannot live happily together, because the hour has not yet come when human beings can thus love each other." No, it is not possible—and there is sorrow and disaster, and Sélysette flings herself from the castle turret, and her poor little body lies bruised

and battered on the courtyard outside. A haunting little tragedy, poignant and sad—with so much of human struggle and despair, so much effort wasted, so little achieved! Aglavaine has tried to be so beautiful and lofty—poor little Sélysette has admired her so much, and felt, like Hedwig in the "Wild Duck," that she must offer up her life, so that the others may be happy. Never has a more heartrending scene been written than the one in the tower where Sélysette gives her parting instructions to little Yssaline, her sister, who unconsciously is urging her on to her death. A haunting little play!

XI

No levity here, no frivolous crowd in the background, cheerfully condoning and themselves practising the breach of the seventh commandment. No, here we see lofty souls, struggling loftily—here the background is a mystic beauty, for which they all are striving. And, deep underneath it, Nature, Fatality, opposing to their fond arguments, their choice aspirations, her own overpowering, dynamic

force. "There where we love each other we are higher than ourselves," says Aglavaine when she tells Sélysette of the feeling she has for Meleander, "there where we love each other we are beautiful and pure." And again, when Sélysette asks meekly whether Aglavaine has kissed him, she replies "Yes. . . . Because there are things that can only be said in a kiss. . . . Because the things in us that are deepest and purest perhaps will not arise from our soul unless a kiss have summoned them. . . ." Ah no, they believe these things, but they are not true; and for all their pious desires and strivings, the day comes when they have to confess to each other, Aglavaine and Meleander, that their love is not that of a brother and sister; and the tragedy, the inevitable tragedy that must attend one of them creeps on, slowly and stealthily, inexorably, and seizes on the weakest of the three; and at the end we find the unhappy Meleander cursing "the beauty that brings unhappiness in its train, the wisdom that tries to be too beautiful—and, above all, destiny that remains so deaf to all. . . ".

XII

For here, in its essence, as in his earlier plays, we find Maeterlinck's people struggling, blindly and helplessly, against Fate. The fate that makes one law for men and women, and admits no exception, not even in favour of the loftiest souls, of idealists and dreamers. Aglavaine herself has to realise that her spacious arguments have failed helplessly before life, with its ruthless logic; Sélysette tries, too, like the others; and her only way is death. The bruised little body in the courtyard is the achievement of these three people who have striven for something that was beyond their power; we are shown that what is beautiful cannot take the place of what is merely human. Treated as only Maeterlinck could treat it, this little play, with its half-tones, its strange recurrences of phrase and idea, its snatches of song, its pale sunlight piercing the gloom, its image of little Sélysette smiling through her tears, and weeping through her smiles, grips the heart almost painfully, and stirs something that lies very deep. There are faults in the play, no doubt; I leave their

enumeration to others. For me, who love it, it remains the moving story of the endeavour, and failure, of noble souls to act nobly.

Alfred Sutro.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MELEANDER

AGLAVAINE

SELYSETTE

MELIGRANE (SELYSETTE'S *grandmother*)

LITTLE YSSALINE (SELYSETTE'S *sister*)

AGLAVAINE AND SELYSETTE

ACT FIRST

A Room in the Castle

MELIGRANE *is asleep on a high-backed chair at the far end of the room. Enter* MELEANDER *and* SELYSETTE.

MELEANDER

I will read you Aglavaine's letter: "Do not go out to meet me. Wait for me in the room wherein you linger, every evening—and thus I shall not come upon you as a stranger. It is as I leave the boat that has brought me to you that I write these lines. Our crossing was very calm and beautiful, but, when I landed, I found the roads all sodden with rain; and the sun will probably have set ere I behold the

towers of the old castle where our good Selysette has offered shelter to her brother's widow. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*clapping her hands*)

Oh! the sun is setting! . . . Look!—she must be near at hand. . . . I will see whether . . . .

MELEANDER

(*staying her with a gesture, and continuing to read*)

". . . I have only seen you once, Meleander, and it was in the midst of the confusion and distraction of my wedding—my poor wedding, alas! where we beheld not the guest none ever invite, who yet always usurps the seat of the happiness we look for. Only once have I seen you, and more than three years have passed since then; but I come to you as confidently as

though we two had known each other from infancy, and had been rocked to sleep in the same cradle. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*turning round*)

Oh! Grandam is still asleep! . . . Ought we to wake her when Aglavaine comes? . . .

MELEANDER

Yes, it is her wish. . . .

SELYSETTE

Her eyes are almost hidden beneath her white hair. . . . She is not happy to-night. . . . Oh! I want to kiss her. . . .

MELEANDER

Be careful you do not wake her too soon. . . . (*He continues to read*) "And, coming to you, I know full well that it is as a brother you will greet me! . . . We said but little to each

other, and yet the few words you spoke to me were different from all those I had heard till then. . . ."

SELYSETTE

Do not read so quickly. . . .

MELEANDER

(*reading*)

". . . And besides, I look forward so eagerly to taking Selysette in my arms! . . . She must be good, she must be beautiful, since she loves you and has your love. I feel that I shall love her much more than you ever can, for I know how to give more love; I have been unhappy. . . . And now, I am glad to have suffered; I shall be able to share with you all that sorrow brings us. There are times when I think that the tribute I have paid may well suffice for the three of us; that destiny can have no further claim

upon us, and that we may look forward to a marvellous life. We shall seek happiness, and naught beside. We shall so fill ourselves, and all around us, with beauty, that there will no longer be room for sorrow or misfortune; and, would these none the less force their entrance, needs must they too become beautiful before they dare knock at our door."

(*A door opens. Enter little* YSSALINE.)

YSSALINE

I have the key, little sister, I have the key! . . .

MELEANDER

What key?

SELYSETTE

The key of the old tower.

MELEANDER

I thought it was lost. . . .

SELYSETTE

I have had another one made.

MELEANDER

I hope you will lose that one, too.

SELYSETTE

(*examining the key*)

Oh! how large it is! . . . It does not look like the one I lost.

YSSALINE

I was there, little sister, when they tried it. . . . They opened the door three times, then they shut it again. . . . It fits much better than the other key, which was all rusty. . . . But it was hard to close the last time, because of the wind, which was pushing from the other side. . . . There is a great wind to-night. You can hear the sea-gulls all round the tower; and the doves, too. . . . They have not yet gone to sleep. . . .

SELYSETTE

They are looking for me; they have not seen me up there for a long time—two weeks and more. . . . I will go to-morrow.

YSSALINE

With me, little sister?

SELYSETTE

Yes, if you will go to bed at once; your nurse is waiting. . . . (YSSALINE *goes.*) She is beautiful? . . .

MELEANDER

Who?

SELYSETTE

Aglavaine.

MELEANDER

Yes, very beautiful. . . .

SELYSETTE

Whom is she like?

MELEANDER

She is like no other woman. . . . Her beauty is different, that is all . . . stranger and more ethereal; it is never the same—one might almost say it was more manifold . . . it is a beauty along which the soul can pass unhindered. . . .

SELYSETTE

I know I am not beautiful. . . .

MELEANDER

You will never say that again, once she is here. It is impossible to say anything one does not believe, or that is useless, in her presence. Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

SELYSETTE

Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

MELEANDER

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

Meleander?

MELEANDER

We have lived together for nearly four years, have we not? . . .

SELYSETTE

It will be four years, when the summer ends.

MELEANDER

Nearly four years that you have been by my side, always beautiful, always tender and loving, and the soft smile on your lips revealed the deep happiness within. . . . Tell me, you have not shed many tears during these four years? At most some few little tears when a pet bird flew away, or your grandmother reproved you, or your favorite flowers died. But no sooner had the bird returned, or your grandmother forgiven you, than you came back into the room laughing merrily

and leapt on my knee, kissing me like a little girl home from school. I think we may fairly claim to have been happy; and yet there are times when I wonder whether we have truly lived near enough to each other. . . . I know not whether it was I who lacked the patience to follow you, or you who fled too swiftly; but often, when I tried to speak to you as I spoke just now, you would seem to reply to me from the other end of the world, where reasons unknown to me had impelled you to seek refuge. . . . I do not know why this is borne home to me so clearly this evening.—Is it because Aglavaine lives more freshly in my memory? Has her letter, the news of her arrival, already freed something in our soul?—You and I would seem to have loved each other as much as it is possible to love. But,

when she is here, we shall love each other still more; we shall love each other differently, more deeply—you will see. . . .

SELYSETTE

Love her if you will. I shall go away. . . .

MELEANDER

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE

I know that I cannot understand. . . .

MELEANDER

You do understand, Selysette, and it is because I know that you understand, though you feign the contrary, that I speak to you of these things. . . . There are depths in your soul that you never reveal to me; nay, you take pleasure in hiding them. . . . Do not cry, Selysette, I am not reproaching you. . . .

SELYSETTE

I was not crying. Wherefore should I cry?

MELEANDER

And yet I can see that your lips are trembling. . . .

SELYSETTE

My thoughts were far away. . . . Is it true that she has been unhappy?

MELEANDER

Yes, she has been unhappy on account of your brother. . . .

SELYSETTE

Perhaps she deserved to be. . . .

MELEANDER

I doubt whether a woman can ever deserve to be unhappy. . . .

SELYSETTE

What was it my brother did?

MELEANDER

She begged me not to tell you. . . .

SELYSETTE

You have been writing to each other?

MELEANDER

Yes; from time to time.

SELYSETTE

You never told me.

MELEANDER

When her letters came I have more than once shown them to you, but you did not seem anxious to read them. . . .

SELYSETTE

I don't remember. . . .

MELEANDER

But I remember it well. . . .

SELYSETTE

Where was it that you saw her for the last time?

MELEANDER

Have I not told you I only saw her once? It was in the garden of your brother's

castle. . . . With great trees spreading over us. . . .

SELYSETTE

In the evening?

MELEANDER

Yes; in the evening.

SELYSETTE

What did she say?

MELEANDER

We said but little to each other. But we could see that the lives of both of us tended towards the same goal. . . .

SELYSETTE

Did you kiss each other?

MELEANDER

When?

SELYSETTE

On that evening. . . .

MELEANDER

Yes, when I went away. . . .

SELYSETTE

Ah!

MELEANDER

I think she will stay but a short time with us, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no; I want her to stay. . . . (*There is a noise outside.*) There she is! (*She runs to the window.*) There are torches in the courtyard.

(*A moment's silence. The great door opens and* AGLAVAINE *appears on the threshold. She comes in without saying a word, and stands in front of* SELYSETTE, *looking fixedly at her.*)

MELEANDER

Will you not kiss each other?

AGLAVAINE

Yes. (*She presses a long kiss on* SELY-

SETTE'S *lips, then goes to* MELEANDER, *whom she kisses likewise.*) And you, too. . . .

SELYSETTE

I must wake grandam. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*looking at* MELIGRANE)

How profoundly she sleeps! . . .

MELEANDER

She sleeps like this for many hours each day. . . . Her arms are paralysed. . . . Go close to her; she wishes to see you to-night. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*taking* MELIGRANE'S *hand and bending over her*)

Grandmother! . . .

MELIGRANE

(*awaking*)

Selysette! . . . (*She opens her eyes.*) Oh! who are you?

AGLAVAINE

Aglavaine. . . .

MELIGRANE

I was startled. . . .

AGLAVAINE

May I kiss you, grandmother?

MELIGRANE

You call me grandmother? I cannot see you very well. . . . Who is that behind you?

SELYSETTE

(*coming forward*)

It is I, grandam.

MELIGRANE

Ah! it is you, Selysette. . . . I could not see you. . . . Bring the lamp a little nearer, my child. . . .

(SELYSETTE *brings a lamp, whose light falls on* AGLAVAINE.)

MELIGRANE

(*looking at* AGLAVAINE)

Oh! you are beautiful! . . .

AGLAVAINE

May I kiss you now, grandmother?

MELIGRANE

No; do not kiss me to-night. . . . The pain is worse than usual. Selysette is the only one who can touch me without hurting.

AGLAVAINE

That is what I want to learn, too—to touch without hurting. . . .

MELIGRANE

Kiss me, Selysette, before I go to sleep again, and take away the lamp. . . . I was in the midst of a strange dream. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*going back with the lamp*)

You must forgive her; she suffers so much. . . .

AGLAVAINE

What is there to forgive, Selysette? You have dropped something. . . . What is it that has fallen on the floor? (*She picks up a key.*) Oh! what a strange key! . . .

SELYSETTE

It is the key of my tower. . . . You don't know all that it unlocks.

AGLAVAINE

It is strange and heavy. . . . I, too, have brought a golden key; you shall see. . . . A key is the most beautiful of all things, so long as we do not know what it unlocks. . . .

SELYSETTE

You shall know to-morrow. . . . Did you notice, as you came here, a very old tower, with its turret in ruins, at the far end of the castle?

AGLAVAINE

Yes; I saw something that seemed to be crumbling beneath the sky. The stars shone through the crevices in the wall.

SELYSETTE

Well, that is it; it is my tower—an old forsaken lighthouse. No one dare go up. . . . You have to traverse a long corridor, of which I found the key. But then I lost it again. . . . Now I have had another one made, for I am the only one who goes there. Sometimes I take Yssaline. Meleander only went once; he felt giddy. It is very high—you will see. The ocean stretches before you. It foams all

round the tower, except on the castle side. And all the birds of the sea live in the crevices of the walls. They send forth loud cries when they recognise me. There are hundreds of doves, too; people tried to drive them away, but they refuse to leave the tower. They always come back. . . . Are you tired?

AGLAVAINE

Yes, a little, Selysette. I have had a long journey.

SELYSETTE

Yes, of course. . . . We will go thither to-morrow; and besides, there is a strong wind to-night. . . .

(*A silence.*)

MELEANDER

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . I had so much to tell you. . . . But in these first moments everything is still, and

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I feel as though there were something for which we were waiting.

AGLAVAINE

We are waiting for the silence to speak. . . .

MELEANDER

What does it say to you?

AGLAVAINE

It would not be the real silence, Meleander, were we able to repeat all that it tells us. . . . We have exchanged a few, almost meaningless, words—words that any one could have spoken—and for all that, do we not feel at rest, do we not know that we have said things to each other that far outvalue our words? We have uttered the little timid words that strangers speak when they meet; and yet, who can tell all that has taken place between the three of us? Who can tell whether

all that has to happen may not have been decided beneath one of these words? . . . But this much our silence has foretold to me: that I shall love Selysette like a little sister. . . . It cried that out to me, through all my soul, as I took my first step into the room; and it is the only voice that I have heard clearly. . . . (*Drawing* SELYSETTE *to her.*) Why is it, Selysette, that one has to love you so dearly, and that the unbidden tears flow forth as one kisses you? . . . (*She presses a long kiss on her lips.*) Come, you, too, Meleander. . . . (*She kisses him likewise.*) It was perhaps this kiss for which we were all waiting, and it will be the seal of our silence for the night. . . .

(*They go out.*)

ACT SECOND

Scene I.—*A leafy grove in the park*

AGLAVAINE *and* MELEANDER

MELEANDER

For five or six days only have we been living together under this roof, and already it seems to me that we must have spent our whole lives together; that I must have known you before I knew myself. All that I am appears to result from you; I am more conscious of your soul than of my own, you are nearer to me than all that is myself. . . . Were you not there I should no longer be conscious of myself; it is only in you that I can smile, only in you that I can love. . . .

AGLAVAINE

So it is with me, too, Meleander. . . . Your least gesture reveals me to my-

self; there is not a smile, not a silence, not a word that comes from you but links me to a newer beauty. . . . I feel that I flower in you as you flower in me; and we are ever springing to birth again in each other. . . . Our souls speak to each other long before the words leave our lips.

MELEANDER

The same world is within us, Aglavaine. God must have erred when He fashioned two souls out of our one. Where were you all these years of our life when neither of us knew of the other's existence?

AGLAVAINE

And you, Meleander, where were you, all these years that I have been waiting, in solitude? . . .

MELEANDER

I was alone, too, and waiting, but hope had left me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I was alone and waiting, but had never ceased to hope. . . . Oh, there are times when I feel that it cannot be! . . .

MELEANDER

I, too, Aglavaine, and it frightens me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Why should we be frightened? . . . We have found each other, what can there be to fear?

MELEANDER

Is it not at the very moment of happiness that fear should come to us? . . . Is that not the most ominous time of all? for not a kiss is given but an enemy may be awakened . . . and besides there is something else. . . .

AGLAVAINE

What?

MELEANDER

Selysette. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Well?

MELEANDER

Have you thought of Selysette?

AGLAVAINE

Yes.

MELEANDER

And does that not trouble you?

AGLAVAINE

No, Meleander, it shall trouble me no more. . . .

MELEANDER

There may be sorrow in store for her. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Can I not love you like a brother, Meleander?

MELEANDER

But if her tears fall? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Let her ascend with us, and her tears will soon cease to fall. . . . Why should she not strive hand-in-hand with us toward the love that disdains the pettiness of love? She is more beautiful than you believe, Meleander. We shall hold out our hands to her; she will soon rejoin us, and then she will weep no more. . . . And she will bless us for the tears she has shed, for some tears are sweeter than kisses. . . .

MELEANDER

Do you believe I can love you like a sister, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER

Aglavaine, do you believe you can love me like a brother?

AGLAVAINE

Now that you have asked me, I no longer seem to know, Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER

I cannot believe it. We shall struggle day and night; we shall struggle for a long, long time; and all that is finest in us, all that might have turned into exquisite love, into beauty and deepest truth, will be exhausted in this futile effort. . . . And the more we struggle, the more shall we be conscious of a desire creeping up between our two souls like a heavy curtain. . . . And all that is best in us will perish, because of this desire. . . . It may seem to mean so little . . . and yet . . . is it not by the kiss we

give that all things are transformed—stars and flowers, night and morning, thoughts and tears? . . . Is the immensity of the night as clear to the sister's eyes as it is to the woman who loves? Let us not bar the door to the most beautiful of all truths, Aglavaine. . . . Let not all that is radiant in our two souls go break itself against one petty falsehood. . . . You are not my sister, Aglavaine, and I cannot love you like a sister. . . .

AGLAVAINE

It is true that you are not my brother, Meleander; and it is here, doubtless, that suffering awaits us. . . .

MELEANDER

I know it, Aglavaine, but what can we do? . . .

AGLAVAINE

It was destiny brought us together, Mele-

ander. We recognised each other as perhaps two souls have never recognised each other before. We love; and henceforth nothing in the world can alter my love for you or yours for me. . . .

MELEANDER

That I believe, too, Aglavaine.—I see nothing in the world. . . .

AGLAVAINE

But if I brought sorrow to one who is innocent, would I be the same to you? . . .

MELEANDER

If she be sorrowful, it will only be because she has not understood. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Tears are not less bitter because they should not fall. . . .

MELEANDER

There would be nothing left us but to fly

from each other, Aglavaine; yet that is impossible. . . . So beautiful a thing was not born only to die; and we have duties towards ourselves. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I believe that, too; and I believe that there is something better to be done than to fly from each other. . . . In the meanwhile, if suffering there must be, let that suffering be ours. . . .

MELEANDER

(*taking her in his arms*)

You are beautiful, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*throwing her arms around him*)

I love you, Meleander. . . .

(*They kiss each other. A cry of pain is heard, through the foliage, and* SELYSETTE *is seen, all dishevelled, flying towards the castle.*)

MELEANDER

Selysette! . . .

AGLAVAINE

Yes.

MELEANDER

She has overheard us. . . . She is flying to the castle. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*pointing to* SELYSETTE, *who is already far way*)

Go after her! . . . Go! . . .

(*He rushes after* SELYSETTE. AGLAVAINE *leans against a tree and weeps silently.*)

SCENE II.—*In the depths of the park.* AGLAVAINE *is asleep on a bench, with a veil thrown round her head.*

(*Enter* SELYSETTE)

SELYSETTE

"Selysette, little Selysette, we must not let her cry." . . . He pities me, be-

cause he no longer loves me. . . . Neither do I love him any more. . . . They fancy that I shall keep very quiet, and that all they have to do is to kiss me with their eyes turned away. . . . "Selysette, little Selysette." . . . They say that very tenderly; oh, much more tenderly than they used to. . . . When he kisses me now he dare not look at me, or, if he does, he seems to be begging forgiveness. . . . And while they are embracing each other I must crouch away and hide, as though I had stolen something. . . . They have gone out again to-night, and I have lost sight of them. . . . "Little Selysette" is not in the secret . . . we always smile when we speak to her . . . we kiss her on the forehead . . . and bring her flowers and fruit. . . . The stranger takes "lit-

tle Selysette" under her wing . . . and we cry when we kiss her, and say, "Poor little thing . . . there is nothing to be done. . . . She will not go away . . . but at least she shall not see anything" . . . and when her head is turned we take each other by the hand . . . yes, yes, till the time comes . . . only wait, wait. . . . "Little Selysette" will have her day, too. . . . She does not yet quite know what she ought to do, but wait a little . . . we shall see. . . . (*Perceiving* AGLAVAINE *on the bench.*) There they are! . . . Asleep in each other's arms! . . . Oh! this! this! . . . I must . . . Yssaline! Grandam! . . . They must see . . . they must see this! . . . There is no one coming! . . . I am alone, always. . . . I will. . . . (*Going closer*) She is

alone, too . . . was it a ray of the moon or her white veil? Perhaps. . . . She is asleep. What shall I do? . . . Oh, she doesn't know! . . . She is on the brink of the well; a sudden turn and she would fall in. . . . It has been raining . . . she threw her veil over her head, but her bosom is bare . . . she is wet through . . . how cold she must be . . . this country is strange to her. . . . Oh, how she trembles in her sleep! . . . I will put my cloak around her . . . (*She covers* AGLAVAINE *up and lifts the veil that hides her face.*) How deep is this sleep of hers! . . . She looks as though she had been crying . . . she does not seem happy . . . she seems no happier than I. . . . How pale she is; she is crying too, I see. . . . She is beautiful. . . . She is

even more beautiful when she is so pale . . . she seems to blend with the light of the moon . . . I must wake her gently . . . she might be frightened and fall into the well . . . (*Bending tenderly over her.*) Aglavaine . . . Aglavaine . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*waking*)

Ah! . . . how light it is. . . .

SELYSETTE

Be careful . . . you are on the edge. . . . Don't turn round, you would be giddy. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Where am I?

SELYSETTE

By the side of the castle well. Did you not know? . . . You should not come here alone. One has to be very careful; this spot is dangerous. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I did not know . . . it was so dark. . . . I saw the boxwood hedge, and a bench. . . . I was weary, and sad. . . .

SELYSETTE

Are you cold? Draw the cloak around you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Whose cloak is this? Yours, Selysette? You put it over me while I was sleeping? You must be cold, too. . . . Come hither, let me wrap it round you, too. . . . You are trembling more than I. . . . (*Turning round.*) Oh! . . . Now that the moon has risen I can see the glimmer of the water between the walls. . . . If I had moved . . . and it is you. . . . (*She throws a long look at* SELYSETTE *and puts her arms around her.*) Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Let us not stay here. . . .

AGLAVAINE

We should never resist moments such as these, Selysette. . . . They do not come a second time. . . . I have seen your soul, Selysette, for just now you loved me, though it was against your will. . . .

SELYSETTE

Let us go, Aglavaine . . . there is fever about this place. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I beseech you, Selysette, do not try to escape me at the very moment when all that is deepest in you is striving towards me. . . . Do you think we shall ever be nearer to each other? . . . Shall we allow little childish words, little words that are as thorns, to steal between these poor hearts of

ours? . . . Come close to me, Selysette, come close to me in the night and let my arms enfold you; and it matters not though you find no words. . . . Something is speaking within you, and I hear it as you hear it. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*bursting into tears*)

Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Aglavaine's tears are falling, too, Selysette. . . . She is weeping because she too is ignorant of the thing that should be done, the thing that should be said. . . . We are alone here, my poor Selysette; we two are all alone here in the darkness, clinging close to each other . . . and the happiness or unhappiness that must befall is being decided within us, at this very moment, perhaps. . . . But what is to

be none can tell. And I have only my tears with which to question the future. I held myself the wiser of the two, but now that the moment has come that calls for wisdom I feel that my need of you is greater than your need of me. And therefore do my tears flow, Selysette, and therefore do I press my lips upon yours, so that we two may be as near as we possibly can to that which is being decided in the depths of us. I hurt you sorely this morning. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no; you did not hurt me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I hurt you sorely this morning, and my one desire is never to hurt you again. But how can we help giving pain to those we love most? . . .

SELYSETTE

(*sobbing*)

Aglavaine!

AGLAVAINE

What is it, Selysette? You are trembling.

SELYSETTE

It was the first time I had seen you asleep. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You will often see me asleep, Selysette.

SELYSETTE

And no one had ever told me anything. . . . No one, no one!

AGLAVAINE

Yes, yes, my poor Selysette, they will doubtless have told you the things they tell to all. But you had not yet learned to listen. . . .

SELYSETTE

It was not the same thing. . . . Never, never. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Because you did not listen, Selysette; and look you, it is not only the ear that listens; and the things that I am saying to you now have not been truly heard save by your heart alone, and your heart has flung the words aside, and gathered only that I love you. . . .

SELYSETTE

I love you, too. . . .

AGLAVAINE

And therefore have you listened to me, and understood so well all that I cannot say. It is not only our hands that are joined at this moment, my poor Selysette. . . . But Meleander loves you, too. Why would you not listen to him? . . .

SELYSETTE

He is not like you, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

He is better than I; and more than once must he have spoken to you far more wisely than I could speak. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no! it is not the same thing. . . . Listen, I cannot quite explain what I mean. When he is there I hide within myself. . . . I keep back my tears. . . . I do not want him to think I understand. . . . My love is too great. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Say on, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

It is so difficult. . . . You will never understand, and I know not how to tell you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Though I fail to understand your words, I

shall know what your tears are saying. . . .

SELYSETTE

Well, there it is, Aglavaine. . . . I do not want him to love me for anything else. . . . I want him to love me because it is I. . . . Oh, it is impossible to say quite what I mean! . . . I do not want him to love me because I agree with him, or because I can answer him. . . . It is as though I were jealous of myself. Can you understand a little, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE

When we look into a crystal vase we can soon tell whether there be pure water within, Selysette. . . . You were afraid lest he should see how beautiful you are. . . . This fear comes often to those who love, and know not why they fear. . . . We are too

anxious, perhaps, that the others should divine. . . . And it is a fear that should be overcome. . . . For look you, Selysette, by dint of hiding from others the self that is in us, we may end by being unable to find it ourselves. . . .

SELYSETTE

I know I am not wise, Aglavaine. . . . I would have him love me, even though I knew nothing, though I did nothing, though I saw nothing, though I were nothing. . . . I feel that I would have him love me though I no longer existed. . . . And so I hid, I hid. . . . I wanted to keep everything hidden. . . . It is not his fault, Aglavaine. . . . And so I was glad when he shrugged his shoulders or shook his head as he kissed me . . . much happier than when he admired me. . . . But I suppose

I am wrong in wishing to be loved like this? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Who can tell how we should love, Selysette? . . . Some love one way, some another; love does this or that, and it is always well, because it is love. . . . In the very heart of us have we built love's cage, and we eye it as we would a vulture or strange eagle. . . . The cage is ours, but the bird belongs to none. . . . There is nothing in the world that is further from us than our love, my poor Selysette. Needs must we wait, and try to understand. . . .

SELYSETTE

You love him, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE

Whom, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

Meleander. . . .

AGLAVAINE

How can I help loving him?

SELYSETTE

But do you love him as I love him?

AGLAVAINE

I try to love him as I love you, Selysette.

SELYSETTE

But if your love for him became too great? . . .

AGLAVAINE

I do not think one's love can ever be too great.

SELYSETTE

But if he loved you more than he loves me?

AGLAVAINE

He will love in you what he loved in me, for it is all one. . . . There is not a creature in the world so like to me as Meleander. How could he not

love you, seeing that I love you? And how could I love you if he did not? He would no longer be like himself, or like me. . . .

SELYSETTE

There is nothing in me that he can love, and you know so much that I shall never know. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Ah, Selysette, believe me when I tell you that all my knowledge may well be worth no more than what you deem your ignorance. . . . I shall show him that you are more beautiful than he thought, that your feelings lie far deeper, too. . . .

SELYSETTE

Can you bring about that he will still love me when you are there?

AGLAVAINE

Were he no longer to love you because of

my being here, I would go away at once, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

I will not let you go away. . . .

AGLAVAINE

And yet that would have to be, for I should no longer love. . . .

SELYSETTE

It would make me very unhappy, Aglavaine. . . . Oh, I am beginning to love you, to love you! . . .

AGLAVAINE

I have loved you a long time. . . .

SELYSETTE

I have not; and when I first saw you I did not love you, though I loved you all the same. . . . There was a moment when I wanted . . . oh! wicked things, very wicked. . . . But I did not know that you were like

this. I should have been wicked had I been you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

No, no, Selysette . . . in your real self you would never have been wicked, but, being unhappy, you would not have known how to be good. . . .

SELYSETTE

I should like to kiss you again, Aglavaine. . . . It is strange; at first I could not kiss you. . . . Oh! I was afraid of your lips . . . I know not why . . . and now. . . . Does he often kiss you?

AGLAVAINE

He?

SELYSETTE

Yes.

AGLAVAINE

Yes, Selysette, and I kiss him, too.

SELYSETTE

Why?

AGLAVAINE

Because there are things that only a kiss can tell. . . . Because it is perhaps only when summoned by a kiss that all that is deepest and purest issues forth from our soul. . . .

SELYSETTE

You can kiss him when I am there, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

If you wish it I will never kiss him again.

SELYSETTE

(*suddenly bursting into tears*)

And you can kiss him when I am not there. . . . I am glad I awakened you, Aglavaine. . . .

(*She leans on* AGLAVAINE'S *shoulder and sobs softly.*)

AGLAVAINE

I am glad I awakened you, Selysette. . . . Come, let us go. . . . It is

well not to linger too long in a spot where one's soul has been happier than a human soul may be. . . .

(*They go out together with their arms about each other.*)

SCENE III.—*A room in the castle*

MELIGRANE *and* SELYSETTE *are at the far end in the shadow.*

MELIGRANE

It is too much for you, my poor Selysette, say what you will. . . . You shake your head, but at this very moment you are wiping away your tears. . . .

SELYSETTE

But, grandam, have I not told you that it is only because I am happy that my tears flow? . . .

MELIGRANE

When people are happy they do not cry like that. . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh, yes, they must; otherwise, why should I be crying? . . .

MELIGRANE

Listen to me, Selysette. . . . Just now I heard all you had to tell me about Aglavaine. I cannot speak as she does. I am an old woman who knows but little, yet I have suffered, too, and you are all I have in the world. . . . There are truths in these things, let me tell you, that may, perhaps, not be as beautiful as those whereof Aglavaine speaks; but it is not always the most beautiful truths that are right, and the oldest and simplest that are wrong. . . . One thing is very clear to me, my poor Selysette; that, for all your smiles, your cheek is ever growing paler and paler, and no sooner do you believe you are alone

than your tears begin to flow. . . .

(AGLAVAINE *enters, unperceived, at the back of the room.*)

MELIGRANE

. . . And tell me how you think all this can end. . . . I have turned it over patiently, sitting here in this corner of mine, and I am doing what I can to speak calmly, though I grieve to see the suffering that has come to you, and that you have done nothing to deserve. There are only two human solutions to sorrows such as these; either must one of you die or the other go away. . . . And who should go away, if not the one whom destiny sent too late? . . .

SELYSETTE

Why she, rather than the one who came too soon?

AGLAVAINE

(*coming forward*)

One cannot come too soon, my poor Selysette . . . one comes when the hour has sounded, and I think our grandmother is right. . . .

SELYSETTE

If she be right there is much unhappiness before us. . . .

AGLAVAINE

And if she be wrong, there will still be tears. . . . Adieu, Selysette. It is late; Meleander is waiting for you. . . .

SELYSETTE

Will you not come and embrace him with me, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE

I shall never kiss him again, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

What has happened, Aglavaine? Your

eyes are shining. You are keeping something from me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

My eyes are shining because I have no longer anything to keep back, Selysette. . . . But a few moments ago I realised how far deeper his love lay for you than he imagined. . . .

SELYSETTE

Did he say so? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Nay, if he had said so I should not have been so sure. . . .

SELYSETTE

And you, Aglavaine, does he not love you any more?

AGLAVAINE

He loves me less than he loves you, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh! my poor Aglavaine! . . . But it is impossible. . . . Why should he love you less? Tell me what to do. . . . Shall I stay with you? . . . I will tell him. . . .

AGLAVAINE

No, no . . . go to him, Selysette . . . never shall I be happier than I am to-night. . . .

(*They kiss each other silently and go out by different doors.*)

ACT THIRD

Scene I.—*In the Park*

(*Enter* Meleander *and* Selysette)

SELYSETTE

Forgive me, Meleander—you would rather be alone, I know. I am always a cause of sorrow to you; but I will only stay a moment. . . . I have just come from Aglavaine's room—she is already asleep; I kissed her and she awoke not, though the stars were shining on her bed. . . . I shall not keep you long; and then we will go and wake her, for she is sobbing in her sleep. . . . I was afraid to wake her by myself—but there is something I want to ask you . . . so far, I do not know whether I am right or wrong—or whether it be good or bad.

. . . I cannot ask Aglavaine, and you will forgive me if I am mistaken.

MELEANDER

What is it, Selysette?—Come here, and sit by me. I will play with your hair while you talk; and not seeing me, you will be able to speak out more bravely. . . . I believe there is something that presses heavily on your heart. . . .

SELYSETTE

Not on my heart, Meleander . . . but on me . . . I know not where . . . on my soul, perhaps . . . it is something that weighs me down and makes me understand—what? . . . I know nothing of it yet, but I am happier than when my soul was free. . . .

MELEANDER

. . . There are times when the poor heart is almost overwhelmed, and the

soul still deems itself happy. . . . But enough of this; tell me first of all what it is that distresses you to-night. . . .

SELYSETTE

Aglavaine is going. . . .

MELEANDER

Who?—Aglavaine? Did she say so to you?

SELYSETTE

Yes. . . .

MELEANDER

When? . . . And why is she going?

SELYSETTE

She did not say . . . but she will certainly go; for now she thinks it is right, and that it should be done . . . and I am asking myself whether it would not be better that I should go instead. . . .

MELEANDER

Who?—You, Selysette?—but what can have happened? . . .

SELYSETTE

Nothing has happened, Meleander; and I beseech you, say not a word of this to Aglavaine—you would only call forth her tears, though there be no cause for them. . . . But, you see, Meleander, I have been thinking these things over, too, while you and she have been together and I sat there by the side of our grandmother . . . and when you two came back, you were always so happy, so united, that every one was compelled to be silent, as you drew near. I have often said to myself that I am only a poor little creature who could never follow in your footsteps; but you have both been so good to me that I did not realise this

as soon as I should, and you have often wanted me to go with you, because I was sad. And when I was there, each of you seemed very lighthearted, but there was not the same happiness in your souls, and I was between you like a stranger shivering with cold. And yet it was not your fault, nor was it my fault either. I know full well that I cannot understand; but I know also that this is a thing that has to be understood. . . .

MELEANDER

My dear, dear and good Selysette . . . what is it that you think you do not understand?—Do you imagine that we understand something that you do not? . . . It is always the soul that knows how to display itself that attracts us, but the one that hides is no less beautiful; nay, it may well be

more beautiful, by dint of its very unconsciousness. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no; though I tried my hardest, there would always be a difference, Meleander; and whenever something I do pleases you, it is only because I have been trying to imitate Aglavaine. . . .

MELEANDER

Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh, Meleander, I did not say that to reproach you . . . did you think it was meant as a reproach? I am no longer as I used to be, and I shall never reproach any one again. Even I myself cannot tell why I have changed like this, and if any one had told me, a little time ago, that the sadness would bring happiness with it, and that I should one day press my

lips on the lips of the woman you were to love—if any one had told me this, I should never have believed it; and yet it has all come to pass and I cannot help it. . . . And though you tell me that you love me, thinking thus to drive away my sadness, you can never say to me the things you say to Aglavaine. . . .

MELEANDER

Perhaps I could not say the same things, Selysette. The things that we really wish to say can never be put into words, and it may be that when we wish to speak very earnestly to one we love, we are but replying to questions that the ears cannot hear. And never do two different souls ask the same questions. And therefore, though we know it not, are our words never the same. . . . But the questions that your candid soul puts to me, my poor

Selysette, are as beautiful as the questions of Aglavaine's soul. . . . They come from another region, that is all. So let that not sadden you, Selysette. . . . Come, give me your lips. . . . I kiss you on your soul to-night, Selysette. . . . Come, mid-night is striking. . . . Let us go and see whether Aglavaine be still sobbing in her sleep. . . .

(*They go out with their arms about each other.*)

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle*

(*Enter* AGLAVAINE *and* MELEANDER)

AGLAVAINE

Do you hear that door close?

MELEANDER

Yes.

AGLAVAINE

It is Selysette. . . . She heard us coming

and wished to leave us alone together. . . .

MELEANDER

She said to me that she would be going to her tower this morning; they have told her of a great strange bird. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I am certain she must have been here; the whole room seems to be awaiting her return. . . . Look at the little work-things she has left by the window . . . the skeins of silk, the jewels, the gold and silver threads. . . .

MELEANDER

And here is her ring with our names inscribed on it. . . . And there are violets—and here is her handkerchief. . . . (*He takes the handkerchief and trembles as he touches it.*) Ah! . . .

AGLAVAINE

What is it? . . .

MELEANDER

(*hands her the handkerchief*)

Here. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER

It is still warm with her tears. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You see, Meleander . . . as she will not speak, here are these smallest things of all that speak for her, and tell me it is time. . . . (*She takes the handkerchief.*) Give it to me, Meleander. . . . Poor little witness of all that is hidden from us, not to understand thee one must be dead indeed. . . .

MELEANDER

Aglavaine. . . .

(*He tries to kiss her.*)

AGLAVAINE

Do not kiss me. . . . Love her well, Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER

I do not know what to believe, Aglavaine. . . . There are times when I seem to love her almost as much as I love you, and times when I love her more than you, because she is further from me, or that I understand her less. . . . And then, when I see you again, she disappears, I no longer am conscious of her. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I know that you love her, Meleander, and therefore I must go. . . .

MELEANDER

But it is only in you that I can love her, Aglavaine, and when you are far away, I shall love her no longer.

AGLAVAINE

I know that you love her, Meleander, and so well do I know it that I have more than once envied the poor child the love that you gave her. . . . Ah! do not think I am perfect! . . . If Selysette is no longer as she seemed, I too have changed since I have lived among you. When I came I was wiser than one had need to be. I told myself that beauty could not be blamed for the tears it caused to flow, and I believed the goodness vain that had not wisdom for its guide. But now I realise that true goodness is human and foolish, and stands in no need of wisdom. . . . I thought myself the most beautiful of women; I have learned that the feeblest of creatures are as beautiful as I, and they know not of their beauty. . . . When I look at Selysette, I ask myself whether

the timid efforts of her tender soul be not greater, and a thousand times purer, than anything I can do. There is something in my heart whispers me that she is unspeakably beautiful. She has only to stretch out her hands, and they come back laden with her heart's treasures, and she offers the priceless gems as tremblingly as might a little maid who was blind, and knew not that her two hands were full of diamonds and pearls. . . .

MELEANDER

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . When you speak to me of her I admire you and you only, and love you more and more. . . . You praise her, but the praise falls back on you, and nothing in this world can make it otherwise. My love for her can never approach my love for you, even though a God so willed it. . . .

AGLAVAINE

When I came here, I believed that all things were possible, and that no one need suffer. . . . But now I see that life refuses to conform to our plans, be they never so beautiful. . . . And I feel too that were I to linger by your side and cause others to suffer, I should no longer be what you are, nor would you be what I am, and our love would no longer be the same as our love of to-day. . . .

MELEANDER

It may be so, Aglavaine. . . . But, for all that, should we not be in the right? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Ah, Meleander, it matters so little whether one be right or not! Better, I think, be wrong all one's life than bring tears to the eyes of those who are not in the

right! . . . I too know all that might be said; but why say it, seeing that we know full well that it can nowise alter the deeper truth that will have none of our most beautiful words. . . . It is this we must listen to, this truth that disdains fair speeches! Notwithstanding all that we say and do, it is the simplicity of things that directs our life; and to struggle against that which is simple is only to court failure. . . . Why were we made to meet, you and I, when it was too late? Who knows? Who would dare to say that destiny and Providence are not one? . . .

MELEANDER

(*clasping her in his arms*)

I love you, Aglavaine; and it is the best love of all that is coming upon us. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*putting her arms around his neck*)

I love you, Meleander, and the love that is coming upon us is the love that never dies. . . .

(*A silence.*)

MELEANDER

Have you given a thought to what our life will be in the time to come, when we shall be far away from each other, when all that will remain of this great love of ours will be the faint memory that will fade away like all memories? What shall I be doing next year? What will you be doing next year, out yonder? . . . The weary days and months will frown upon us as we stretch out arms to each other across the emptiness. . . . For all that we say that our love will remain unchanged through the years that will di-

vide us, and the forests and trees that will stretch between, this poor life of ours is too full of moments when the tenderest recollection yields before the absence that lasts too long. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I know it, Meleander. . . . Here, we might be happy; there, unhappiness most assuredly awaits us. . . . And none the less do we both feel that the thing which I am doing is the thing which should be done. . . . And, were you able to pronounce a word that would keep me here, you would not say that word. . . . Needs must those who love that for which others care not, have sorrows that others cannot conceive. There is no reward, my poor Meleander, but we two look for none.

(*They go out.*)

SCENE III.—*At the foot of a tower*
(*Enter* AGLAVAINE *and* MELEANDER)

AGLAVAINE

'Twas not a moment ago that I saw her. She was at the top of the tower, surrounded by screaming sea-gulls. For the last two or three days she has spent most of her time up there. And I know not what strange shadow it throws across my soul. She seems to be less unhappy, but at the same time more troubled in her mind, and it is as though some plan were being prepared in that profound little heart of hers. . . .

MELEANDER

She seems to be smiling at her former life —at the Selysette of old. . . . Have you not noticed that there is always a song on her lips? . . . A mysterious light seems to shine upon

her as she walks before us. . . . It would be better not to speak of your departure till she is calmer; better to wait till all that is now transforming her has taken deeper root in her soul. . . .

AGLAVAINE

No; I shall tell her to-day. . . . And as to what should be said to her, I have thought that over too, and at first I imagined it would be well to conceal the truth, so that she should suffer less. . . . Do not smile, Meleander. . . . There is so little of the ordinary woman in me that you may well be surprised to find that I am like other women in this—that in the depths of my heart I, too, possess their feeble, tortuous wisdom—and that when love commands it, falsehood comes to me as readily as to my sisters. . . . So I had made up my

mind to tell her that I no longer loved you, that I had deceived myself, that your love for me was dead too, and countless other little things that would have lessened me in her eyes, and thus lessen her grief, too. But in truth, when those great pure eyes of hers confronted me, I felt that it was not possible, because it was not beautiful. . . . Listen. . . . I hear her; she is coming down the tower-stairs, singing. . . . Leave us, Meleander; I must speak to her alone, for she says things to me that she cannot yet say to you; and besides, it is only when two people are alone together that truth descends from its very fairest heaven. . . .

(MELEANDER *goes. A silence; then the voice of* SELYSETTE *is heard as it gradually comes nearer.*)

The voice of SELYSETTE

When forth her love went
(I heard the door close)
When forth her love went,
She smiled. . . .

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)
When back he did fare
Another was there. . . .

And I could see Death
(I heard her soul moan)
And I could see Death
That still watches her breath. . . .

(SELYSETTE *comes in*)

AGLAVAINE

Oh, Selysette, how bright your eyes are this morning! . . .

SELYSETTE

It is because a beautiful thought has come to me, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Tell it to me; we must never keep back a beautiful thought, for all the world is the happier for it. . . .

SELYSETTE

I cannot tell it to you yet. . . . Little Selysette has her secret too, and a secret it must remain! . . . But what would you have done had you been Selysette—what would you have done if another Aglavaine, even more beautiful than you, had appeared one day and thrown her arms around Meleander?

AGLAVAINE

I think I should have tried to be happy—to feel that more light had flown into the house, and I should have tried to love her even as you love me, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

You would not have been jealous?

AGLAVAINE

I cannot tell, Selysette . . . in the depths of my heart, perhaps . . . for one moment . . . but I should have recognised that it was unworthy, and I should have tried to be happy. . . .

SELYSETTE

I am going to be happy, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Not for one single instant shall you ever be unhappy again. . . .

SELYSETTE

I should be perfectly happy if I were only sure that this idea of mine was good. . . .

AGLAVAINE

So there is something you mean to hide from me, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, but only till it has become very beautiful. . . .

AGLAVAINE

When will it be very beautiful?

SELYSETTE

When I know . . . when I know. . . . Little Selysette can be beautiful too . . . you will see, you will see. . . . Oh you will love me much more, both of you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Is it possible to love you more than we do, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

I would so dearly like to know what you would do, if you were I?

AGLAVAINE

Tell me then, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

If I were to tell you it would no longer be the same, and you could not tell me the truth. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Do I not speak the truth? . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, I know; but here you could not. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You are strange to-day, Selysette; take care, for it may be that you are wrong. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no; let me kiss you, Aglavaine . . . every kiss will whisper to me that I am not wrong. . . .

AGLAVAINE

There is a strange brightness in your eyes, my little Selysette . . . as though your soul were leaping within you. . . .

SELYSETTE

And your eyes are brighter to-day, too, though you try to hide them. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I also have something to say to you, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh what is it, Aglavaine? . . . you look as though you were afraid, as well as I. . . . Can it be the same thing? . . .

AGLAVAINE

What thing, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

Nothing, nothing. . . . I was merely . . . tell me what it is, quickly. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I am afraid it may distress you, Selysette, though it ought to bring happiness to you. . . .

SELYSETTE

I shall never shed another tear, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*seizing her arm*)

What does this mean, Selysette? you said that so strangely. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no . . . I shall not cry any more, that is all; is that not as it should be?

AGLAVAINE

Let me look into your eyes. . . .

SELYSETTE

Look, look . . . tell me what you see. . . .

AGLAVAINE

For all that we say the soul shows itself in the eyes, it seems to vanish as we gaze into them. . . . And as I stand, with the fears I dare not speak of upon

me, before the limpid waters of your eyes, it is they that seem to question me, and to murmur timidly: "What dost thou read?" instead of answering the question I cannot frame. . . .

(*A silence.*)

SELYSETTE

Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

What was it you were going to tell me? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Come to me, little Selysette! Alas! but a little more and I had taken from you all you had in the world. . . .

SELYSETTE

You are sad, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Let us sit here, at the threshold of your

tower, and let your lips be close to mine, as on that evening when we spoke to each other for the first time . . . do you remember that evening by the well? More than a month ago, my poor Selysette; many things have died since then, many sprung to life, and a little more light has come unto the soul. . . . Not many more moments such as this will be vouchsafed to us, for to-morrow I wend my way from amongst you, and everything that we do for the last time of all seems so grave and solemn to these poor hearts of ours. . . .

SELYSETTE

You mean to go to-morrow?

AGLAVAINE

Yes, to-morrow, Selysette: it was that I wanted to tell you. At first I thought it would be best to keep back the truth,

so that the sorrow should not come upon you all at once. . . . But when I thought of you, I felt at once that it could not be. . . . And therefore I have come to tell you that to-morrow I shall go from here in order that you may be happy, and I tell it you in all simplicity, content that you should know how my departure saddens me, content even that you should share in the sacrifice; for we are all three making this sacrifice, and making it for something that, nameless though it be, is yet far stronger than we. . . .

SELYSETTE

Do not go to-morrow, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Why not to-morrow, since go I must? . . .

SELYSETTE

I ask you not to go till I have told what I have to tell. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Will you tell me soon?

SELYSETTE

Yes, for now I am sure. . . . And does Meleander know what you have just now said to me?

AGLAVAINE

Yes.

SELYSETTE

I am no longer sad, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

What would you have done, Selysette, if I had gone away without telling you?

SELYSETTE

I should have followed and brought you back, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

And if you had not found me?

SELYSETTE

I should have spent my life seeking you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

My fear is lest you should go before I do, Selysette—I am wondering whether that can be the idea you spoke of. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, for there would be sorrow in that, and my idea now is full of gladness. . . . I had thought, I too, of going away without saying a word, but now . . .

AGLAVAINE

Now you will not go?

SELYSETTE

No, no, Algavaine mine; I shall not leave the castle. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You promise me that, from the depths of your soul?

SELYSETTE

From the depths of my soul, and by my eternal happiness, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

It had been better, perhaps, that I had never come. . . .

SELYSETTE

In that case I had never been happy or unhappy, for I was nothing. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Perhaps it is not well to awaken those who slumber, above all when their sleep is innocent and sweet. . . .

SELYSETTE

Surely it must be well, Aglavaine, since they never wish to slumber again. . . . When I think of the time when my eyes were sealed, I would fain hide myself for shame. . . . When I used to kiss Meleander I was only a little blind girl who did not know . . . but was it altogether my fault that I counted for so little? . . . Whereas now . . . I looked at him

to-night as he lay asleep . . . and then . . . I can tell you, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*embracing her*)

Selysette, my little Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

And then I kissed him, but he did not awake. . . . And I could see the stars in the blue of the windows; and I felt as though all those stars had come to me to build a heaven in my soul. . . . Oh my poor Aglavaine, you will never know—for you always knew. . . . But to be able to say, "I love you," to be able to say it with one's eyes open, to the man one loves! . . . I understand now . . . I know not why I am yearning all the time to go away or to die. . . . I

am happy, and fain would I die, so as to be happier still. . . .

AGLAVAINE

It is dangerous to think of death at moments of too much happiness. . . . I will make a confession to you. . . . For one second the fear rushed across me that the idea you spoke of before . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes. . . .

AGLAVAINE

That that might have been the idea. . . .

SELYSETTE

You need not be afraid, Aglavaine, such an idea as that could come only to quite a little girl. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Yes, it would be the idea of a blind little heart, to whom death might seem the one proof of love. . . . Whereas,

on the contrary, those who love must live; and the more we love, the more must we wish to live. . . . But apart from that, I knew that your love for us was far above that kind of love. . . . And surely it is only some one who longs to plunge two fellow-creatures into despair, who could devise anything so terribly cruel as to place an innocent death between them. . . .

SELYSETTE

Shall I make a confession too, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Tell me everything, even as I have told you everything, my little Selysette. It is sweet to feel that there is nothing between us, not even a flower wherein could hide a thought not shared by both. . . .

SELYSETTE

I had thought of it for an instant. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Of death?

SELYSETTE

Yes, long ago. . . . But I at once told myself all you have just told me; and then something else came to me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

And that is?

SELYSETTE

Oh something quite different, and it is on the side of life. . . . But the time for telling is not yet. . . . You shall see. . . . I kiss you, Aglavaine. . . . I feel I know not what . . . it is as though my soul—was it you who said it? . . . as though my soul were leaping within me. . . . And now I know at last what you would do if you were I. . . .

(*They go out with their arms about each other.*)

ACT FOUR

SCENE I.—*A terrace overlooking the sea*

(AGLAVAINE *and* SELYSETTE *enter and meet each other.*)

AGLAVAINE

The sun is rising over the sea, Selysette; and the waves are full of joy in their tranquillity. The fragrance and limpid silence of the dawn make one feel as though one were alone in the world, and there is something of the dawn in every word one says; is it not so? The day will be very beautiful. Shall it be the day of my departure?

SELYSETTE

No, no; you shall not go. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I came to meet you because I saw you just now from the window of my room. I was frightened, Selysette. . . .

You were leaning over, nearly all your body was leaning over the crumbling old wall at the top of the tower. I imagined for a moment that the stones were giving way. I turned pale, pale —there was a chill at my heart that I had never known before. I felt my life trembling on my lips. . . . I opened the window and screamed to warn you; but you did not understand. . . . Destiny is capricious—you do wrong to tempt it thus. What were you doing up there? This is the third time I have seen you on the tower. . . . Your hands seemed to be pulling at the stones. . . . What were you doing, Selysette? You seemed to be seeking something in space. . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, I was seeking something. . . . Have they not told you? . . . But first of all do not be frightened about

me, there is no cause. . . . My old tower is stronger than they think; it will outlive us all. Why speak ill of it? It has done no one any harm, so far; and the stones are fast; I know that better than any one. . . . But have you not noticed? Here is something taking place so close to you, and you know nothing of it! . . . Five or six days ago a strange bird came to us, and it flies round and round my tower, and never seems to tire. . . . Its wings are green—a strange, pale green, inconceivably strange and pale. . . . And there is something else that is inconceivable, too; it seems to grow day by day. . . . None have been able to tell me from what country it has come. . . . I think it must have made its nest in a crevice in the wall; it was there that you saw me bending over. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Is that the key of the tower, that great golden key with which you are playing? . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes; you remember I let it fall the day you arrived. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Will you give it to me? . . .

SELYSETTE

Give it to you? . . . Why? . . .

AGLAVAINE

I would like to keep it by me till I go. . . .

SELYSETTE

But why, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE

I scarcely know . . . Wait till I am far away before you go up there again, Selysette, and leave the bird with the green wings alone. . . . Last night

I dreamed, and the bird appeared in my dream. . . .

SELYSETTE

Here is the key, Aglavaine. . . . I don't mind giving it to you. . . . It is heavy. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Yes, it is very heavy.

SELYSETTE

Kiss me, Aglavaine. . . . Have I made you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINE

You have never yet made any one unhappy. . . . Your eyes are filled with tears. . . .

SELYSETTE

I was looking at the sun, as I kissed you. . . . Kiss me again. . . . I was going to Meleander, he told me he would be up early. . . . Good-bye, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*slowly*)

Good-bye, Selysette. . . .

(SELYSETTE *goes.* AGLAVAINE *waits till she is far away, then, going to the end of the terrace, she looks for an instant at the golden key and, with a sudden movement, flings it far away into the sea. Then she goes too.*)

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle*

(MELIGRANE *is asleep at the back. Enter* SELYSETTE, *holding little* YSSALINE *by the hand.*)

SELYSETTE

Let us kiss grandam first of all; for who will kiss her when we are gone? And surely she needs our kisses no less than the others. . . . But say nothing to

her. . . . Aglavaine took away the key of my tower, because she was afraid. But I have found the other key—the one we thought was lost. And so we can go up without any one knowing, and I will capture the green bird. . . .

YSSALINE

Will you give it to me at once?

SELYSETTE

I will give it to you if you say nothing. But be careful, I am going to awaken grandam. . . . Do I look unhappy, Yssaline? . . .

YSSALINE

Is there anything I can say that would make you happy, little sister?

SELYSETTE

You must tell me the truth. . . . Grandam must not imagine that I am unhappy. You see, often when one is

very happy people make mistakes and believe one has been crying. . . . You cannot see that I have been crying?

YSSALINE

Let me look at you carefully, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

Can you see anything?

YSSALINE

You must come nearer to me, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

I will take you in my arms and kiss you. . . . You see nothing? . . .

YSSALINE

One never quite knows when you are crying, little sister; you do it so softly. . . .

SELYSETTE

But I have not been crying at all. . . . And remember, if they ask you to-day,

when you are alone, "What did she say, what did she do, was she pale, or sad?" you must not answer all at once if you see that they are frightened, or if those about you are too pale. . . . But you must tell them that I seemed to be happy, and indeed every one can see that I do nothing but smile, that I am smiling all the time; and we must always tell the truth. Now, be careful, for I am going to grandam. . . . Ah! how forsaken she looks! . . . (*She imprints a long kiss upon* MELIGRANE'S *lips.*) Grandam. . . . (MELIGRANE *does not awake.*) It is I, grandam. . . . How heavily she sleeps. . . . Grandam, I am come to bid you good-bye.

MELIGRANE

(*awaking*)

Ah! it is you, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, grandam, Yssaline and I have come to kiss you, for we are going for a walk to-day. . . .

MELIGRANE

Whither are you going?

SELYSETTE

I do not know yet, but we mean to go a little further than usual. . . . We shall not be back before evening. Have you all you need, grandam? Aglavaine will come and take care of you in my stead. Shall I arrange the cushions before I go? I am the only one who knows how to lift you without hurting you. But Aglavaine will learn. She is so good that she will know at once if you will only let her. . . . Shall I call her? . . .

MELIGRANE

No, no; I shall sleep till you return. . . .

SELYSETTE

Good-bye, grandam, good-bye. . . .

MELIGRANE

Good-bye, Selysette; come back before the night. . . .

(SELYSETTE *goes quickly, holding little* YSSALINE *by the hand.*)

SCENE III.—*A corridor in the castle*

(MELEANDER *meets* SELYSETTE, *who is holding little* YSSALINE *by the hand.*)

MELEANDER

Where are you going so hurriedly, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

Nowhere, Meleander. . . . We are seeking shelter from the sun. . . .

MELEANDER

In very truth this is a day when the stones seem to melt in the walls, and the sea to have turned into a fiery lake. The eternal freshness of the forest is noth-

ing but the heated breath of a funeral pile; and the sun looks like a raging lion about to swallow up the sky. . . . Kiss me, Selysette, for if there linger yet any fragrance of the dawn it is surely to be found on your lips. . . .

SELYSETTE

No; I have no time; they are waiting for me—you shall kiss me this evening. . . .

MELEANDER

What is the matter, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

Ah! It is such a little thing and over so soon! . . .

MELEANDER

What do you say?

SELYSETTE

Nothing, nothing. . . . Kiss me quickly. . . .

(*She kisses him violently.*)

MELEANDER

Ah! . . . my lip is bleeding. . . .

SELYSETTE

What?

MELEANDER

A drop of blood. . . . Those beautiful little teeth of yours have wounded me, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . . Have I hurt you, Meleander? . . .

MELEANDER

It is nothing. . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . . What time is it?

MELEANDER

Close on noon.

SELYSETTE

Noon? Oh, I must hurry . . . they are

waiting, waiting. . . . Good-bye, my Meleander.

MELEANDER

Selysette, Selysette, where are you going?

SELYSETTE

(*singing as she hastens away with little* YSSALINE)

When forth her love went
(I heard the door close)
When forth her love went
She smiled. . . .

(MELEANDER *stands looking after her: then goes out.*)

SCENE IV.—*At the top of the tower*

(*Enter* SELYSETTE *and little* YSSALINE)

SELYSETTE

Here we are, Yssaline, in the turret of the tower, and now we must know what we have to do. . . . Oh the brightness there is this morning over earth

and sea and sky! Why is this day so much more beautiful than other days? . . .

YSSALINE

Where is the green bird?

SELYSETTE

He is there, but we cannot see him yet. . . . In a minute or two we will lean over the wall, but let us look around us first. One can see the castle and the courtyards, the woods and the gardens. All the flowers have opened on the banks. . . . How green the grass is this morning! . . . I cannot see Aglavaine. . . . Oh look, there is Meleander. . . . He is waiting for her. . . . Bend down, we must hide; he must not know we are here. He is close to the well; it was there that I awakened Aglavaine. . . .

YSSALINE

Look, little sister, look; come here. . . . I can see the gardener planting flowers round the house. . . .

SELYSETTE

You will see them grow and you will see them open, Yssaline, and you will pluck them for me. . . . Come, come, it is more than I can bear. . . . Let us look from here; here there is only the sea, which is far away . . . (*They go to the other side of the tower.*) How beautiful the sea is too! . . . In not a single corner is sorrow to be found to-day. . . . The sea is so green, so deep, so beautiful, that one's courage goes. . . . And whatever may happen, Yssaline, it will go on smiling just the same until nightfall. . . . Look at the little waves on the beach. . . . I can-

not, I tell you, I cannot! . . . The flowers and the sea will not let me. . . . I shall never be able to do it in the daylight.

YSSALINE

Oh, here are the gulls, little sister, the gulls are coming! Oh how many there are! . . . how many! There must be two thousand! . . .

SELYSETTE

They have all flown here together from the far end of the sea. . . . They look as though they were bringing us news. . . .

YSSALINE

No, no; it is fish they are bringing, little sister. . . . And their young ones are screaming, too, from their holes in the wall. . . . Their beaks are bigger than they are. . . . Look, look, do you see that great gull with

the eel? . . . Don't you see? . . . There, there. . . . They have eaten it already. . . . And the others are over there too. . . . The big ones are eating nothing. . . . There again, did you see? . . . She kept nothing for herself. . . . Is she the mother, little sister?

SELYSETTE

What did I say to grandam, Yssaline?

YSSALINE

Why are you crying, little sister?

SELYSETTE

I am not crying, Yssaline—I am thinking, thinking. Did I kiss her before I went away? . . .

YSSALINE

Yes, you kissed her as you said good-bye.

SELYSETTE

How often did I kiss her?

YSSALINE

Once, little sister, we had no time. . . .

SELYSETTE

I fear I was not gentle enough. . . .

YSSALINE

We were in a great hurry, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no; it must not be. . . . She will be quite alone, Yssaline, and this will ever linger in her mind. You see, if you have not been gentler than usual when you go away, they believe that you no longer love them. . . . Whereas it is the contrary they should believe; it is just when our love is too great that we are afraid to be gentle. . . . Though perhaps we are wrong; for whatever they do, and were they to live a thousand years, it

is only the last word we said to them that they can remember. . . . I saw that myself when my mother went. . . . At the last moment of all she did not smile at me, and it comes back to me again and again that she did not smile. . . . And the rest of life seems scarcely to count. . . . And besides, what did I say of Aglavaine? . . . I don't remember. I must see grandam again. . . . The others, it is for them; they must not know. . . . But she is quite alone; and it is not for her sake that I climb into the tower, not for her sake that I shall go down . . . you must see that it is impossible. . . . Come, come, we will go and kiss her very tenderly. . . .

(*They go out.*)

SCENE V.—*A room in the castle*

(MELIGRANE *is asleep.* SELYSETTE *and little* YSSALINE *come in.*)

SELYSETTE

(*waking* MELIGRANE)

Grandam. . . .

MELIGRANE

You are back at last, Selysette. . . . I I have long been waiting for you. . . .

SELYSETTE

Forgive me, grandam, I fear I was not as gentle as I should have been when I bade you good-bye. . . .

MELIGRANE

Oh but you were, Selysette, you were very gentle. What is the matter? There is something on your mind. . . .

SELYSETTE

There is nothing on my mind, grandam. It is only that I feel I must tell you how I love you. . . .

MELIGRANE

I know you do, Selysette. You have shown me your love again and again, and I never have doubted it. . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, grandam, I know . . . but I myself have never known till now. . . .

MELIGRANE

Come nearer to me, my child—you know that I can no longer embrace those I love, now that these poor arms of mine have ceased to do my bidding. . . . Put your arms round me again as I cannot put mine around you. . . . You seem strange to-day, Selysette. And so it is only now that you know you love me?

SELYSETTE

Oh no; I knew it, I knew it, but sometimes one knows a thing so long without knowing. . . . And then, one day,

we feel we have not been kind enough, that we might have done more, that we have not loved as we should have loved. And we want to begin again before it be too late. I have neither father nor mother, grandam, and had you not been there, I should have forgotten what a mother might mean. . . . But you never forsook little Selysette, and it was a great joy to know there was some one to go to when I was unhappy. . . .

MELIGRANE

No, no, Selysette mine, it was you who did not abandon me. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no, grandam. . . . I know full well that it is you who stayed on for my sake. . . .

MELIGRANE

You are strangely serious this afternoon,

Selysette, and for all that you do not seem sad. . . .

SELYSETTE

I have always been very happy, grandam, and now I know the meaning of happiness. . . .

MELIGRANE

You do not mean that it has gone from you, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

Far from that, I believe I have found it, grandam. . . . And tell me, have you been happy?

MELIGRANE

When, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

In the time that has gone, grandam. . . .

MELIGRANE

Of what time do you speak, my child?

SELYSETTE

The time when life was. . . .

MELIGRANE

There have come to me days of sorrow even as they come to all that live on this earth, but I may truly claim to have been happy, since you have never once left me. . . .

SELYSETTE

You must not let me count for so much in your happiness, grandam. . . . If you were to lose me you would still have Aglavaine. . . .

MELIGRANE

I have never lulled her to sleep on my knee, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

But still you must love her, grandam. . . .

MELIGRANE

You love her, and therefore I love her, my child. . . .

SELYSETTE

And most of all should you love her because it was she who brought happiness to me. . . . She is so beautiful, she is so beautiful that ever since my heart has known of her, I have lived by her side with my eyes full of tears. . . .

MELIGRANE

How your hands burn to-day, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

It is because my happiness is too great. . . .

MELIGRANE

I love you, Selysette mine. . . .

SELYSETTE

Have I ever been the cause of sorrow to you, grandam?

MELIGRANE

I cannot remember, my child. . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, yes, you must needs remember . . . for we bring sorrow to all those we love. . . . But tell me, I beg of you, when it was that I hurt you the most. . . .

MELIGRANE

It was only when you cried that you saddened me; and then it was not your fault. . . . I remember nothing else. . . .

SELYSETTE

I shall never cry again. . . .

MELIGRANE

Ah, Selysette, happiness sways to and fro like the pendulum of a clock. But we do well to keep back our tears as long as we can. . . .

SELYSETTE

You are right, grandam; and when happi-

ness shall have returned to you—to them and to you, grandam, get them to sit beside you one evening and tell them the story of a poor little girl. . . .

MELIGRANE

What are you saying, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

Nothing, nothing. . . . I was thinking of the days when I was a little child. . . .

MELIGRANE

So do I often think of those days, Selysette. I was not ill, then, and I was able to carry you in my arms or run after you. . . . And thus, thanks to you, I have been a mother a second time, long after my beauty had left me; and some day you will know that women never weary of motherhood, that they would cherish death itself, did it fall

asleep on their knee. . . . But little by little all passes away, Selysette, and the very smallest soon cease to be small. . . .

SELYSETTE

I know it, grandam, and sorrow passes away, too, passes away and disappears. . . . But beauty remains and others are happy. . . .

MELIGRANE

Who told you that, my child?

SELYSETTE

I learned it from Aglavaine. . . .

MELIGRANE

How your eyes sparkle to-day, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*stifling a sob*)

It is because I love all the world, grandam. . . .

MELIGRANE

I believe you are crying, my child? . . .

SELYSETTE

Oh no, I am not crying; and if one or two tears are falling, they are only tears of joy. . . .

MELIGRANE

Put your arms around me, Selysette—closer, closer, and stay with me. . . .

YSSALINE

Little sister, I want to be kissed too. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*Gently moving* YSSALINE *away*)

No, no, Yssaline, she shall have all my kisses to-day. . . . The day will soon come when it will be your turn to have all the kisses. . . . Farewell, grandam, farewell. . . .

MELIGRANE

Selysette! . . . what is the matter? . . .
. . . where are you going? . . .

SELYSETTE

Farewell, grandam, farewell. . . .

MELIGRANE

Selysette, stay here. . . . I won't have it. . . . You shall not go. . . . (*She struggles in vain to rise and stretch out her arms.*) I cannot, I cannot. . . . You see that I cannot, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

I, too, cannot, grandam . . . farewell . . . sleep in peace to-night and—do not dream . . . farewell, farewell. . . .

(*She goes out quickly holding little* YSSALINE *by the hand.*)

MELIGRANE

Selysette! . . . Selysette! . . .

(*She is heard sobbing softly to herself as the light grows fainter and fainter.*)

SCENE VI.—*A Corridor in the Castle*

(*Enter* SELYSETTE *holding little* YSSALINE *by the hand. She sees* AGLAVAINE *coming to meet her, and hides with little* YSSALINE *behind one of the pillars which support the roof.*)

AGLAVAINE

(*drawing near*)

Is it you, Selysette? Why are you hiding?

SELYSETTE

I scarcely know, Aglavaine. . . . I thought you would like to be alone. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Where were you going to, Selysette?. . . And here is little Yssaline looking at me from the corners of her eyes. . . . Is there a plot between you?

SELYSETTE

I have made a promise that I must keep. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Whither were you dragging Selysette, Yssaline? (YSSALINE *does not answer.*) Won't you tell me?

SELYSETTE

Oh, she knows how to keep a secret quite as well as though she were grown up. . . .

AGLAVAINE

It may be the evening light, but you look very pale, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

I want to kiss you, Aglavaine. . . .

(*They exchange a long kiss.*)

AGLAVAINE

Oh, your lips are soft and sweet to-night, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Yours too, Aglavaine. . . . I am very happy. . . . There is strength on your lips. . . .

AGLAVAINE

A light shines from you as from a lamp. . . .

SELYSETTE

You have not seen grandam?

AGLAVAINE

No. Shall I go to her?

SELYSETTE

No, no; there is no need; she is asleep. . . . You were looking for Meleander?

AGLAVAINE

Yes. And you, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

When you see him, kiss him for me. . . . I am glad to think that it is you who will kiss him when I am not there. . . . I love you so much, so much! . . . But see how impatient Yssaline is, and how she is pulling my

hand. . . . Good-bye, Aglavaine mine; you will see me soon. . . .

(*She goes with little* YSSALINE, *and sings as she moves along.*)

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)
When back he did fare
Another was there . . .
And I could see. . . . Ah! Ah! . . .

(*The song ceases suddenly and* AGLAVAINE *goes out.*)

SCENE VII.—*At the top of the Tower*

(*Enter* SELYSETTE *and little* YSSALINE)

SELYSETTE

And now the hour has come, my little Yssaline. I shall not go down to them again; I shall not smile gently at them any more. . . . How cold it is in the tower; the wind comes from the

north. See the light that it throws on the waves. . . . The flowers are hidden from sight, the voice of mankind is still, and sadness hangs over all. . . . How different from this morning. . . .

YSSALINE

And where is the bird, little sister?

SELYSETTE

We must wait till the sun has sunk into the very depths of the sea, till the light lies dead on the horizon, for the bird is afraid of the light, and has never yet looked at the sun. . . .

YSSALINE

And if there should be any stars, little sister?

SELYSETTE

And if there should be any stars? . . . (*Looking at the sky.*) There are no

stars yet, but they are all waiting, eager to peer through the sky; and we must hasten, for it will be more terrible still when they are there. . . .

YSSALINE

I am very cold, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

Let us sit here; the wall will keep the wind from us, and we will wait till the last gleam of crimson shall have died away in the sea. . . . How slowly the sun is sinking. . . . When it is gone I will look for the bird. . . . Let me wrap my white scarf about you; I shall want it no more. . . .

YSSALINE

Why are you holding me so close to you, little sister? . . .

SELYSETTE

Because my happiness is too much for me,

Yssaline; never have I been happier than I am to-day. . . . But look well at me. . . . I am smiling, I am sure I am smiling. . . . Why do you not smile at me? . . .

YSSALINE

You are speaking so quickly, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

Am I speaking quickly? . . . I have no time to lose. . . .

YSSALINE

And besides, you are tearing up all my flowers. . . .

SELYSETTE

What flowers? Oh, these! . . . I was forgetting that they were yours. . . .

YSSALINE

I will not have you cry, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

But I am not crying, my little Yssaline.

. . . That is the very last thing of all that any one must believe. . . . I am smiling so much that I seem to be crying. . . .

YSSALINE

Then why do your eyes seem to be crying? . . .

SELYSETTE

How can I tell what my eyes choose to do? . . . But remember this well: if you tell any one that I seemed to be sad, you will be punished for a long, long time. . . .

YSSALINE

Why?

SELYSETTE

You will know some day. And you must not ask me so many questions; you are only a little girl who cannot yet understand the things that are clear to others. I did not understand either

when I was your age, no, not until very long after. . . . I may do this or that; but it is not the things you see that matter the most. . . . Look you, my little Yssaline, I must not speak of it, though I should so much like to tell some one, for it is sad to be the only one who knows. . . .

YSSALINE

I can hardly see the sun now, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

Wait, wait yet a little, Yssaline; for as the sun goes down, so does something else come nearer and the nearer it comes to me the more clearly do I see. . . . I can no longer tell whether I have acted wisely in bringing you to the tower; but some one had to come with me, for they will want to know all that

took place, and they will be happy if only they do not know. . . . You do not understand a word of what I am saying to you now, little sister mine. . . . Yes, but a day will come when you will understand it all, when you will see all that you cannot see now that your eyes are beholding it. . . . And then you will be sorrowful, nor will you ever be able to forget what you are about to see. . . . But when you are a woman you will shed many tears because of this, and it may even weigh upon your life. . . . And therefore I ask you to-day to forgive me, though you know not why, for the suffering that will come upon you some time when you know too well. . . .

YSSALINE

The flocks are coming back, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

They will come back to-morrow too, Yssaline.

YSSALINE

Yes, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

And the birds will sing to-morrow. . . .

YSSALINE

Yes, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

And the flowers will open to-morrow. . . .

YSSALINE

Yes, yes, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

Why had it to be the younger of the two? . . .

YSSALINE

There is only a little red line there now, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE

You are right; it is time. . . . You yourself are urging me to it; and the stars too are growing impatient. . . . Farewell, Yssaline. I am very, very happy. . . .

YSSALINE

So am I, little sister. Be quick, the stars are coming. . . .

SELYSETTE

Have no fear, Yssaline; they will see me no more. . . . Come, sit in this corner, and let me fasten my scarf around you, for the wind is very cold. . . . Do you really love me? No, no; do not answer; I know, I know. . . . I am going to roll up this big stone, so that you cannot go near the opening over which I mean to bend. . . . Do not be frightened if you should not see me any more. It will only

mean that I have had to go down the other side. . . . Do not wait for me; go down the stone staircase by yourself. . . . And, above all, do not try to see what I have done, do not go near this wall. . . . You would see nothing and you would be punished. . . . I shall wait for you below. . . . Kiss me, Yssaline, and tell grandam. . . .

YSSALINE

What shall I tell her, little sister? . . .

SELYSETTE

Nothing, nothing. . . . I thought I had forgotten something. . . . (*She goes to the crumbling wall that faces the sea and leans over.*) Oh, how deep and cold the sea looks! . . .

YSSALINE

Little sister?

SELYSETTE

There it is; I see it. . . . Do not move. . . .

YSSALINE

Where is it? . . .

SELYSETTE

Wait . . . wait . . . I must bend over a little more. . . . Yssaline! . . . Yssaline! . . . The stones are trembling! . . . I am falling! . . . Oh!

(*A side of the wall gives. The sound of a fall is heard, and a low cry of pain. Then a long silence.*)

YSSALINE

(*rising, in tears*)

Little sister! . . . little sister! . . . Where are you? . . . I am frightened, little sister! . . .

(*She bursts out sobbing, alone in the turret.*)

ACT FIFTH

SCENE I.—*A Corridor in the Castle*

(*Enter* AGLAVAINE *and* MELEANDER)

MELEANDER

She has fallen asleep; but the doctors are going, and, pray as I might, I have not been able to draw a single word of hope from them. . . . She fell on to a hillock of sand, that the wind had swept to the foot of the tower, as though to receive her more tenderly. It is there that the servants found her, whilst you were hoping to meet her on the road to the village. There is no wound to be seen on her poor little body; but a stream of blood flows from her lips; and when she opened her eyes she smiled at me, but said not a word. . . .

AGLAVAINE

But Yssaline? What does Yssaline say? They tell me she was with her. . . .

MELEANDER

I have questioned her. . . . She was found at the top of the tower, trembling with cold and fright. . . . She repeats, over and over again, through her tears, that the wall opened while Selysette was leaning over so as to lay hold of a bird that was passing. . . . When I met her this afternoon, here in the corridor—and it was on this very spot, between the pillars—she seemed less sad than usual. . . . "She seemed less sad than usual!" . . . Do we not both stand condemned by those words? . . . And now, when I think of all she has said to us, of all she has done, monstrous suspicions burst upon my

soul, and crush my life. . . . Love is as cruel as hate. . . . I no longer believe, I no longer believe. . . . And all my sorrow turns into loathing! . . . Curses on the beauty that brings disaster with it! . . . Curses on the mind that craves for too much beauty! . . . Curses on the destiny that is blind and deaf! . . . And I curse the words that deceive and betray, and I curse the life that will not give ear to life! . . .

AGLAVAINE

Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER

What do you want of me? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Come with me. . . . I must see her, for it is not possible. . . . We must know. . . . She cannot have done it deliberately. She cannot, for in that case . . .

MELEANDER

In that case?

AGLAVAINE

We must know. . . . Come. . . . No matter how. . . . Her suffering must have been too great before she would have done that! . . . And I would never again be able, never, never. . . .

(*She drags him away quickly.*)

SCENE II.—*Selysette's Bedroom*

(SELYSETTE *lies upon her bed. Enter* AGLAVAINE *and* MELEANDER.)

SELYSETTE

(*with a slight movement*)

Is it you, Aglavaine? Is it you, Meleander?—I was wanting you both so much. I am happy now you have come. . . .

MELEANDER

(*bursting into tears as he throws himself upon the bed*)

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE

What is the matter? . . . You are both crying. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Selysette! Selysette! . . . What have you done? . . . Oh wretch that I am! . . .

SELYSETTE

What is the matter, Aglavaine? . . . Why are you so distressed? . . . Have I done anything to make you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINE

No, no, my poor Selysette, you do not bring unhappiness. . . . It is I who bring death . . . it is I who have failed to do all that I should have done. . . .

SELYSETTE

I do not understand, Aglavaine. . . . What has happened—tell me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I ought to have known, Selysette, and I thought I did know, when I spoke to you the other day. . . . For many days past something has been unceasingly crying aloud in my heart, and I found nothing, and knew nothing, of what should be done—though it needed but the simplest word that the simplest creature on earth might have spoken to save a life that only craved to live. . . .

SELYSETTE

What did you know? tell me . . .

AGLAVAINE

When you spoke of that idea of yours, the other day, Selysette . . . and this

morning, and again this afternoon, I should have held you close to me, so close that it should have fallen between us like a pressed-out grape. . . . I should have plunged my two hands into your soul, and dragged forth the death that I felt was living there. . . . I should have achieved something by dint of love . . . and I knew of nothing I could do, and I looked on and was blind to it all, though I saw everything, everything! . . . The wretchedest girl of this wretched village would have found a kiss that should save life for us! . . . I have been either unutterably base or unutterably blind! . . . The first time, perhaps that I have fled from the truth like a child! . . . And I dare not look into myself. . . . Forgive me, Selysette; I shall never be happy again.

SELYSETTE

Listen to me, Aglavaine. I am very glad that you have come to me at once, for I feel that ere long my mind will wander from me. . . . There is something here which presses on my eyelids. . . . But whatever I may say, later on—I cannot tell what I may say —you know the strange fancies that flit across the dying. . . . I was at a death-bed once, and it is my turn now. . . . Well, whatever I may say later on, pay no heed. . . . But at present I know what I am saying; and do you listen to that only, and recall that only, and that alone. . . . Surely there lingers not a doubt within you, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Of what should I be in doubt, my poor Selysette?

SELYSETTE

Do you imagine that . . . ?

AGLAVAINE

Yes. . . .

SELYSETTE

That it was not by accident I fell?

AGLAVAINE

I know it was not, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

We are told that falsehood is impossible to those who are dying, Aglavaine, and I mean to tell you the truth. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I knew that, from the love you bore us, you would be strong enough for that. . . .

SELYSETTE

It was an accident, and I fell, Aglavaine. —Is it you who are sobbing, Meleander?

AGLAVAINE

Listen now to me, Selysette. . . . You know that the truth is known to us. . . . And if at this moment I question you, it is not from doubt of mine, but it is so that you, you, should doubt no more. . . . You are very beautiful, Selysette, and I am on my knees before you. . . . The thing that you have done, so simply, is the most beautiful thing whereof love is capable when love is blind. . . . But now I ask you to do something more beautiful still, and I ask it in the name of a wiser love. . . . Locked between your lips, there lies the perfect peace of all our life. . . .

SELYSETTE

Of what peace do you speak, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE

Of one that is deep and very sad. . . .

SELYSETTE

But how can I give it to you, Aglavaine? There is nothing in me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You need but tell us that you wished to die, thinking thus to make us happy. . . .

SELYSETTE

Gladly would I say this to you, Aglavaine, but it is impossible, seeing that it is untrue. . . . You do not believe that one could tell an untruth on one's death-bed? . . .

AGLAVAINE

I beseech you, think not of death, Selysette. . . . See, I kiss you, and pour all my life into your veins, and flood your soul with the spirit of life! . . . If death were near I could understand the telling of this falsehood. . . . But death is far away, and all life is clamouring for the truth. . . . Ad-

mit it, Selysette; and do not shake your head; speaking to each other as we are now speaking, can we possibly misunderstand? . . .

SELYSETTE

And none the less you are wrong, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Must we weep far apart then, with thousands of miles between us? . . .

SELYSETTE

Why will you not believe it to be true?

AGLAVAINE

Not even a child would believe it—for there is not a word of yours, not an act, but proves the contrary. . . .

SELYSETTE

Which words and acts do you speak of? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Why did you bid farewell to our grandmother?

SELYSETTE

I never left the house without first bidding her good-bye. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Why. . . . But why everything, Selysette? . . . Oh, the misery of questions such as these, when death is close by, and we know that the truth is there, to our hand, nestling beneath her heart! . . .

SELYSETTE

Your doubts sadden me, Aglavaine, and I was feeling so happy. . . . What can I do so that you shall doubt no more? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Give us the truth, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

But what is the truth you desire? . . .

AGLAVAINE

It was I who, all unwittingly, urged you to this. . . .

SELYSETTE

No, no, Aglavaine, urged was I by none. . . .

AGLAVAINE

It needs but one word to dispel the clouds from life, and on my knees do I beseech you to say this one poor word. . . . Whisper it to me if you will, let your eyes make a sign to me, and even Meleander shall never know. . . .

MELEANDER

Aglavaine is right, Selysette. . . . I ask it, too. . . .

SELYSETTE

I was leaning over, and I fell. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You asked me so often what I would do in your place. . . .

SELYSETTE

I was leaning over, and I fell. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Do you not know why I question you thus? . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, yes, Aglavaine mine, I can see that it would have been more beautiful, but it would not be the truth.

AGLAVAINE

(*sobbing*)

Oh, God! how poor we are before all those of simple love! . . .

SELYSETTE

Aglavaine! . . .

AGLAVAINE

Selysette! . . . What has happened? . . . You are turning pale. . . . Is the pain worse? . . .

SELYSETTE

No. . . . It is the joy that makes me suffer. . . . Oh! how you are weeping, Meleander! . . .

MELEANDER

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE

Do not weep like this, my poor Meleander. . . . Now indeed do we love each other. . . . There is no need for tears. . . . Soon I shall be dead, and there will be so glad a smile on my lips that you will scarce believe I can be dead, so happy shall I seem. . . . What? You crying too, Aglavaine? Is it not happiness, then? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Give us the perfect peace, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

I will give you the peace you gave me, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You could give it, but you will not. . . .

SELYSETTE

And yet is there such great peace within me, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*sobbing*)

God Himself were wrong before you, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*with a change in her voice*)

But why are you going, said my grandam to me, why go away, my child? Because of a key I have found, grandam, because of a key I have found. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE

(*coming to herself*)

Yssaline! . . . What was I saying? Tell me what I said . . . it is not true . . . I warned you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

You said nothing, nothing. . . . Do not torment yourself, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

I warned you. . . . I may perhaps be saying things soon, but they will not be true. . . . You will forgive me, for my soul is growing so weak. . . . Did I speak of grandam? . . .

AGLAVAINE

Yes. . . .

SELYSETTE

Yes, I wanted to tell you. . . . You must raise her without touching her arms.

. . . I would have taught you, but time, time would not allow. Oh! Aglavaine, be careful! . . .

AGLAVAINE

(*alarmed*)

What is it, what is it, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE

Nothing, nothing; it is going. . . . I thought I was about to say things that were not true. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I will not seek for the truth any more, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

Put your hand over my mouth when I say things that are untrue. . . . Promise, promise, I beseech you. . . .

AGLAVAINE

I promise, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

(*to* MELEANDER)

I have something to say to her, Meleander. . . . (MELEANDER *goes away silently.*) He is sad, he is sad. . . . You will tell him some day, by-and-by, when he has forgotten . . . put your hand on my lips, Aglavaine, a sudden pain has come to me. . . .

AGLAVAINE

Tell me, tell me, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE

I have forgotten what I had to say. . . . It was not truth, but falsehood, that was coming. . . . Put your hand over my eyes, too. . . . It is well that they should be closed by you who opened them. . . . It is true; it is true.

AGLAVAINE

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE

(*very faintly*)

I was . . . I was leaning over, and I fell. . . .

(*She dies.*)

AGLAVAINE

(*with a sob*)

Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER

(*falls, sobbing, on to* SELYSETTE'S *body*)

Selysette! . . .

THE END

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